

Text: John 3:16

Theme: The Gospel in a Nutshell Revisited

March 12, 2017

How many of you know what verse in the Bible is called, “The Gospel in a Nutshell”? It’s probably one of the first verses you memorized and actually remembered long after Confirmation. Whether you recognize the verse or not, John 3:16, our text for today is widely known as “The Gospel in a Nutshell.” Although it may be familiar and many of us may be able to recite it from memory, there’s great benefit in revisiting that verse, in re-reminding ourselves of the great news offered to us in that verse.

I. “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son” is one of the greatest verses in all Scripture. A. Yet as we revisit those familiar words, we realize that we are much like Nicodemus. 1. Like Nicodemus, we recognize the existence of God. Recall the words of Nicodemus, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.” Based on what we have seen and witnessed, we know God exists. Ask the majority of people in our country and they will acknowledge the existence of God. But like Nicodemus, it’s the personal involvement of God, it’s God’s activity in us and for our benefit that we so often question.

2. Like Nicodemus, we sometimes fail to take the message to heart. Nicodemus knew the words. Yet, those words lacked the comfort and encouragement he needed because he merely had head knowledge and not heart knowledge. We, too, find ourselves in the same boat at times. We know the words, but we’re still fifteen inches away from the comfort of those words, the distance from our head to our heart. In history class, facts are great. Facts help us pass the course and move on. But faith isn’t like history class. Words that are just words leave the Gospel in a Nutshell empty, void of its power, unable to change the course of our lives as God intended.

B. As we revisit the great words of our text, what is the core message? 1. The core message is that God acted. Suppose you were a six inch square block of wood. Could you tip yourself over, spin on one corner, or fly across the room? All you could do is sit there like a block of wood. One piece of the core message is that God did the illogical. He moved. Not you, not me, not anyone you know who possesses great faith. God acted. He created a plan. We were that block of wood. In a million years, we would never have accomplished a single task except to be a gigantic paper weight if someone else set us in the right place. But God? God acted. He made things happen.

2. As we build on our core message, we realize that God acted out of love. “God so loved the world.” It wasn’t us who loved God, but God who loved us. But why? What would motivate Him to act? As He looked at us, we were those blocks of wood that were incapable of getting God’s attention. Nothing we did attracted God’s attention. The only reason God noticed us was because God is love, because God is the sum total of love, because God loved His creation more than we can ever comprehend. Out of love, God picked up our block of wood and transformed us. Out of love and for no other reason, God stepped into our broken world with His restoration plan.

3. Our core message is that God's demonstration of love was the death of His Son. Do you realize how illogical that is, how insane it is that God would send His Son to save a block of wood? In the simplest of terms, that's exactly what God did. Nothing, nobodies, even enemies of God from birth, but, out of love, God acted by sending His Son to save us. We were like a block of wood, but He knew how His plan would unfold. So, as His greatest act of love, He sacrificed His Son so that our lives could move from block of wood to on a mission for Christ. Each time we see a cross, it's a reminder that God loves us with a love beyond any love we will ever experience.

4. Building on our core message, faith is the means whereby God's love is able to transform our lives. "That whoever believes in Him should not perish." What was going to happen to our block of wood? Ashes to ashes. If God hadn't intervened, if the Holy Spirit hadn't stepped into our lives and worked faith in our hearts, the faith that enables us to claim this message as our own, eternal death was our destiny. But before we get confused, faith isn't about us. Faith is entirely God's work. God acted. God demonstrated. God enabled us to become the recipients. It was one hundred percent God and zero percent us.

5. As we wrap our core message together, we see that eternal life was the culmination of God's act of love. We were dead, lifeless, a block of wood rescued from an eternal fire. Because God acted in love, He has offered us eternal life by faith. Eternity in hell to eternity in heaven - that's a dramatic transformation. No pain. No heartache. No health issues. No sleepless nights. No worries. No stress. No effects of sin. No aging. Are you interested yet or need we continue? Eternity with God, eternity in the presence of God - we can't fully grasp it, but it's waiting right now because of the message contained in this one single verse.

C. Having revisited, what's our next move? 1. Perhaps our Catechism can help us a bit. "For all which it is my duty to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him." Did your brain take a detour when it heard "duty"? In response, it's our highest privilege, our most glorious opportunity, "To thank, praise, serve, and obey Him." Burden? No. Unfortunate expectation? Not at all. Wonderful means of responding to all God has done for us? Precisely. When a block of wood comes to life, is set on a fantastic mission whose end is the arrival in heaven, thank, praise, serve, and obey become our natural response, our most appropriate response to this great message.

2. Our next move is to share that love with others. How many people in our country are lonely, sad, discouraged, looking for meaning in life? How many of them live in Wisconsin, in Taylor County, within ten miles of our church? You know who you once were, what you once were. Now, God gives you an amazing privilege, the privilege to go and pass it on, to share His love through a kind word, a gentle heart, a random act of kindness, a visit, a card, with anything that shows someone else that they are loved. Our world, our community is waiting. It's begging for someone to care, for someone to reach out in love, for someone to do what others never think of doing.

3. You can be that someone as your response to the Gospel in a Nutshell. Trust me, the recipients of your acts of kindness will never forget what you did because you revisited the Gospel in a Nutshell. Amen.